

Professional Development Infinity Model

Utah State Office of Education Arts Networking Conference

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The Nutcracker Within Us
Doris Trujillo
Peter Christie and Ballet West
Jacqueline Colledge and The Utah Regional Ballet

Pre-Event Objectives:

- To gain insight and knowledge about the history and choreographic intent and processes used to produce The Nutcracker Ballet.
- To explore how ballets are created from a story.
- To gain insight into the interrelationship between the music and the movement of the ballet.

Performance Objectives:

- To demonstrate how pantomime, and court or social dances are utilized in a story ballet.
- To demonstrate how the movement of characters, objects, and ideas is given choreographic form through the process of abstraction.
- To understand the aesthetic which guides the art form of ballet.
- To become inspired by, and fall in love with, the art form of dance.

Workshop Objectives:

- To explore the locomotor and axial movements used in the peasant (Haute) and court (Basse) dances of the Renaissance, which led to development of the ballet.
- To learn a simple sequence of movement from the ballet.
- To create a simple court dance for a formal party setting, as viewed in The Nutcracker Ballet, based on the spatial concepts of meeting, parting, and passing using the locomotor and axial movements explored.
- To demonstrate isolation of body while performing axial and locomotor movements.
- To explore how character is developed through the abstraction of gesture.
- To explore the process of abstraction through gesture.
- To create an original movement sequence based on a real or imagined toy or individual in The Nutcracker Ballet.
- To create a group composition based on an original retelling of the party scene of The Nutcracker Ballet.

Materials:

- Tchaikovsky, The Nutcracker Music DC. The St. Petersburg orchestra or the Pacific Northwest Ballet's arrangements are recommended.
George Balanchine's The Nutcracker Video performed by the New York City Ballet or the video produced by The Pacific Northwest Ballet are recommended.
- The Nutcracker Story
- Drum

Questions to Guide the Lesson:

- How is a ballet created from a story, a book, or an idea?
- How is movement created to define a character in a ballet?
- What are the various ways a story is told through ballet?
- What is the process of abstraction?
- How does the element of energy define movement?

Ballet found its roots in the French Courts during the Renaissance period. It was socially and politically important to be skilled in the court dances of the time. Dance Masters taught men and women the refined steps and etiquette needed to stay in social graces. It was recorded that a man once missed a step and he was banished and shamed from returning to court. The dances performed by the nobility were the Basse Danses, which were generally performed with the foot staying close to the ground and the body held in a vertical fashion. The peasants performed haute dances, which were often performed with movements that came off the floor. In the Nutcracker's party scene we see children and adults perform social dances or we can look back in time and see the combination of the Basse and Haute dances performed together.

Pantomime: The art or genre of conveying a story by body or facial movements and gestures.

The Nutcracker Ballet: Review the history, time-line and interesting facts and stories compiled by the Pacific Northwest Ballet available at www.balletminnesota.org.

Preparing the Body/Moving:

Establish Signals and Set Spatial Boundaries.

Find Personal Space.

Warm-up the body. Beginning with a visualization exercise, placing a warm drop of oil into the center of the body. Visualize the oil moving to the shoulder joint and rotate it in smaller joint articulations such as the wrists, ankles, and elbows. Improvise a series of isolated movements of the large and small joint areas of the body. Continue to find the internal connections of movement that comes from the origin of the warm oil. Have the movement travel through space. Use additional crossover techniques to expand this warm-up to change levels, directions, tempos, and energies.

The pivot joint in the head and the ball and socket joints in the hip and shoulders are designed for us to move smoothly in circular pathways. The energy quality it produces is **sustained**. The body also has hinge joints found in the elbows, knees, fingers, toes, and jaw. These joints do not move as easily or smoothly in circular pathways because they are designed to open and close. In other words, they are designed to move in direct pathways. Explore how these joints open and close. Bend the knee, the elbow, the hip, and all other joints. Explore these movements with hard, abrupt, **percussive energy**. Relate this movement quality to the qualities viewed in various parts of the ballet, for instance the doll or the toy soldier moved most often in this way.

History: Discuss briefly or as time allows, the role court dances played in the development of Ballet. In the Nutcracker's party scene we see children and adults perform social dances, or we could look back in time and see the combination of the Basse and Haute Danses performed together.

Skill Development: Explore and practice the locomotor movements of walking, skipping, jumping, and sliding. Sliding has the rhythm of a gallop and generally moves sideways. It can be performed moving in a forward direction. This is called a **chasse** in ballet. Explore axial movements of bending and spiraling. Learn a Haute and Basse Danse. Compare the similarities and contrasts between the two. Practice performing these dances with the correct style and timing. Create as a class a “Nutcracker party Dance” or learn a section of the Party Scene from a guest or a video clip or create in a small group a composition of locomotor and axial movements using the spatial words meeting, parting, passing and circling.

Investigating:

Gesture as Communication: Explore a gesture of greeting. Expand the range (size/space) of how the gesture is performed. Discuss how **pantomime** is used in ballet. Analyze the gestures of Drosselmeyer or Fritz. Discuss how these gestures define their character. Create a simple sequence of three gestures that define a character at the party interacting with family and friends. Perform this sequence in a literal time and space. Perform the sequence exaggerating the time and space to accentuate aspects of the character you have chosen.

Energy Qualities: Explore energy as the element of dance that defines how we move. Refer to the warm-up section of the class and review the qualities of sustained and percussive movement. Discuss the movement of the toy soldier. Discuss the differences in the way a toy would perform a gesture based on its structure and the materials it is made from. Refer back to the body part isolations in the warm-up that were performed with percussive quality (energy). Explore this quality with the toy soldier I mind. Explore with a partner shaping each other. Touch the partner’s joint to activate the movement. This exploration may be performed with the toucher performing a winding motion to create the illusion of manipulating the toy. (This exploration could lead into an entire lesson or be used inside of this to expand on the mechanical qualities of movement desired). Create your own toy soldier sequence. Explore additional qualities of movement through discussion and exploration of the toys and characters viewed in the Nutcracker Ballet. (Identify the toy or character. Define what quality of movement it would use, the body action it would perform, the body parts it would use, the levels, direction, range, and lines in space it moves in an through, and the tempo and rhythm it defines. Listen to the music that the toy or character will move to and explore how that influences the movement decisions that are made).

The Process of Abstraction: Create an individual sequence of movement based on the movement and gestural exploration of a toy or character from The Nutcracker. Alter the sequence through the **process of abstraction**. Memorize and perform.

Giving Form/Creating:

Create a group composition based on the party scene in the Nutcracker. Create your own sequence of events. Utilize the principles and elements of dance to aid you in this creation. Be cognizant of the principles of choreography, variety, unity, repetition, contrast, and smooth transitions. Each composition should include:

1. A beginning, middle and end.
2. Gesture/pantomime.
3. A court dance, which includes spatial, patterns using locomotor and axial movements.
4. Individual toy and/or character dances.

Reflection and Revision:

Perform the compositions for the class. Receive reflection from the class based on the rubric, the elements of dance and the principles of choreography. Rework the composition and perform.

Rubric:

- The composition had a clear beginning, middle and ending.
- The dancers characters and gestures have been abstracted through the elements of dance with particular emphasis on the quality of energy.
- The movements choreographed are unique.
- The dancers have used spatial patterns that include meeting, parting and passing locomotor movements.
- The dancers are focused and committed in their performance.
- The dancers have worked cooperatively within their group.